

# 2016

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Washington  
Department of  
**FISH and  
WILDLIFE**



## **DISTRICT 11 HUNTING PROSPECTS**

Thurston and Pierce counties, and GMU 667 of Lewis County

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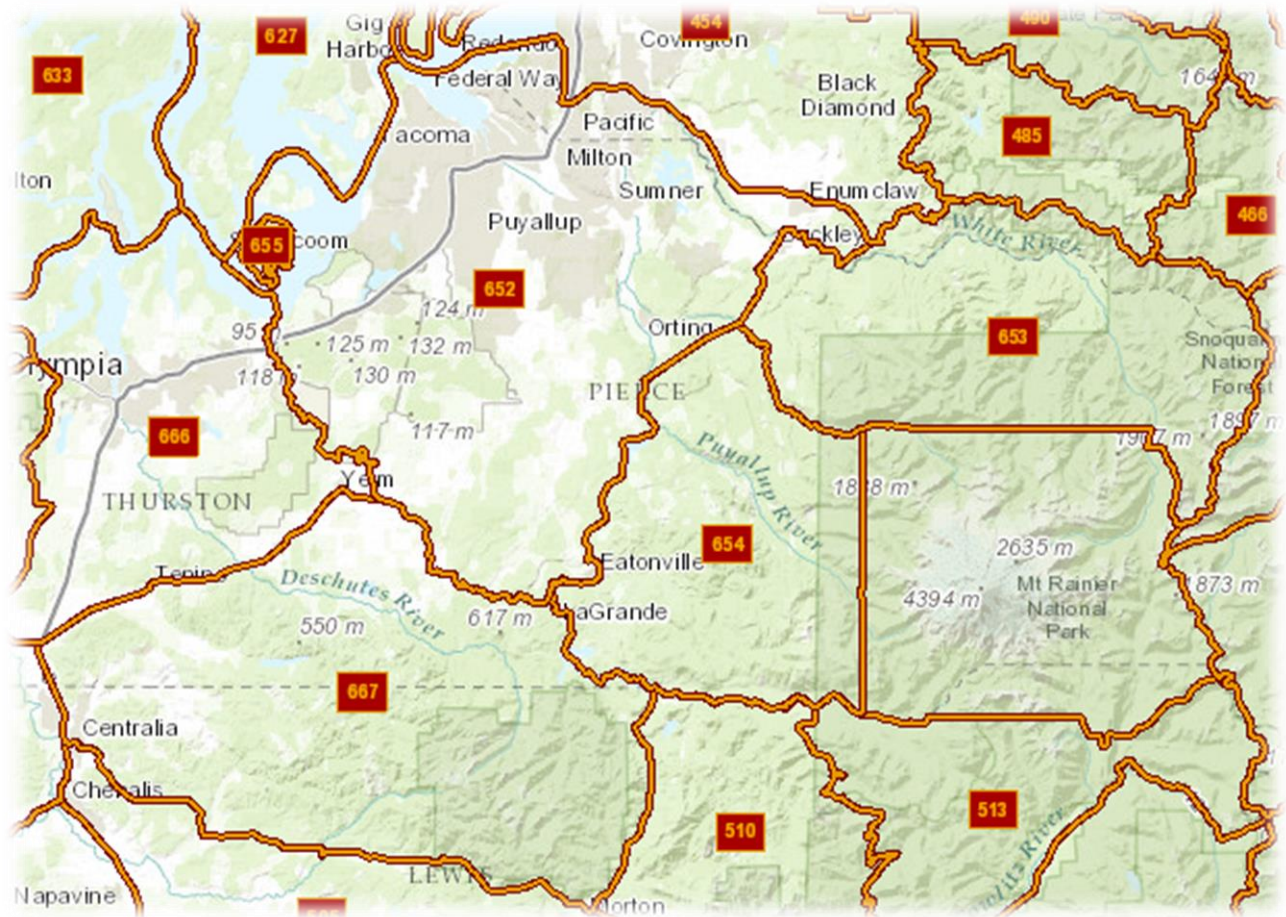
## DISTRICT 11 GENERAL OVERVIEW

The game management units (GMUs) that comprise District 11 are Puyallup (GMU 652), Anderson Island (GMU 655), White River (GMU 653), Mashel (GMU 654), Deschutes (GMU 666), and Skookumchuck (GMU 667). Landownership in the district includes private residential and agricultural (e.g. GMUs 652 and 666), and both private and public industrial timber lands (e.g. GMUs 653, 654, and 667). The eastern portion of GMU 653 contains higher-elevation alpine conditions bordering Mount Rainier National Park.

Varied hunting opportunity exists within District 11, from waterfowl hunting on waterways of Puget Sound, to deer, elk, bear, and cougar hunting on commercial forest land. WDFW's Scatter Creek (GMU 666), Skookumchuck, and West Rocky Prairie wildlife areas (GMU 667), and DNR's Capitol State Forest (GMU 663), Elbe Hills State Forest (GMU 654), and DNR forest ownership provide ample opportunity for small and big game hunting on public land accessed free of charge. Weyerhaeuser's Vail Tree Farm in GMU 667 and Hancock Timber Resource and Muckleshoot Indian Reservation (managed by Hancock) properties in GMUs 653 and 654 all provide excellent big game opportunities, but they require the purchase of access permits to enter (obtained through those respective companies).

Both the North Rainier and South Rainier Elk Herds are partially contained in District 11, providing an opportunity to harvest elk as they migrate out of Mount Rainier high country and follow river drainages to low elevations during the hunting season. Waterfowl hunting on the Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge, off Anderson Island (GMU 655), and inland lakes in the district are some of the best opportunities in the South Puget Sound Region.

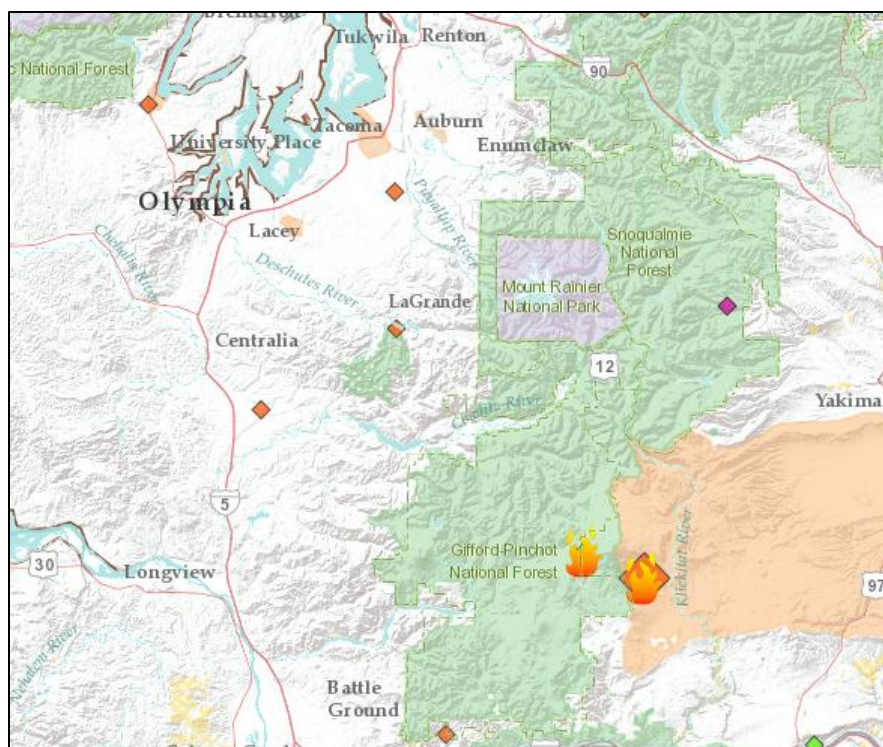
Hunters should be aware of firearm restrictions in certain localities of Pierce and Thurston counties. Maps of Pierce County firearm restriction areas can be seen on the Pierce County website's [Public GIS tool](#) (open Public Safety, check Sheriff's Restrictions) and the Pierce County firearm regulations can be found [online](#) as well. Maps of no shooting and controlled shooting zones in Thurston County can be seen [here](#).



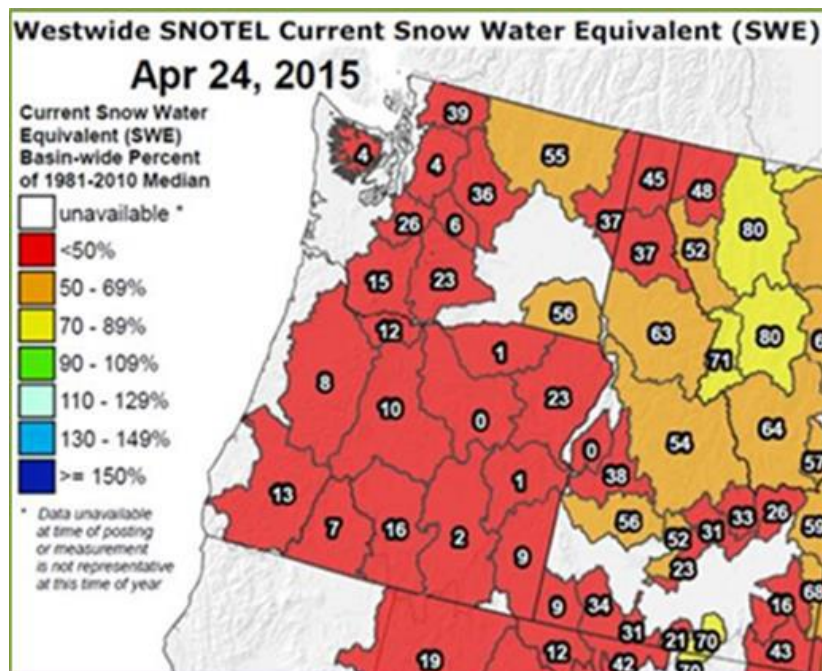
**Figure 1.** Map depicting the six District 11 game management units and surrounding units in neighboring districts (400s for Region 4 and 500s for Region 5).

Although wildfires were significant in Washington State in 2015, there were no high profile fires in District 11. Thus, habitat and wildlife were largely unaffected by fire in 2015 in this district (Figure 2). Regardless, drought conditions, as expressed by reduced snowpack in the winter and early spring, were significant in District 11 and likely affected both the productivity (number of young produced) and survival of game species in 2015 (Figure 3). Precipitation levels greatly improved in 2016, which should benefit this year's productivity. If so, this will be confirmed by higher numbers in 2017.





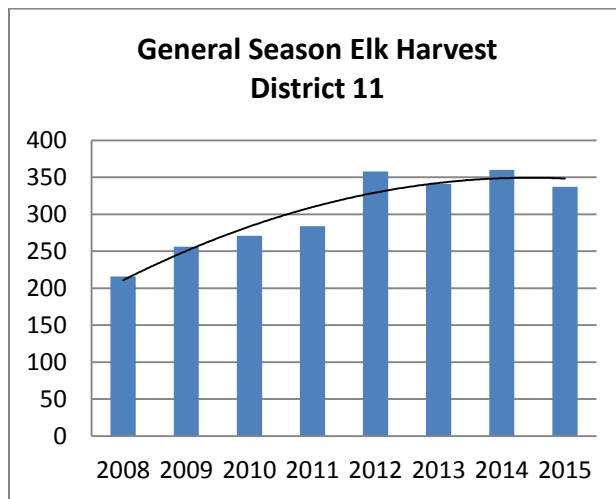
**Figure 2.** Map depicting the location of the nearest high profile wildfire to District 11 in 2015, a significant fire east of Mt. Rainier (NRCS 2015).



**Figure 3.** Map depicting the snowpack drought conditions in District 11 and across western Washington in 2015 (NRCS 2015).

## ELK

Both the North Rainier and South Rainier elk herds are partially contained in District 11, providing ample opportunity to harvest elk. Elk availability should continue to increase in all GMUs as both the North and South Rainier elk herds continue to recover, having met recovery goals over the past 10 years. Antlerless restrictions, winter elk habitat closures, and permit hunt restrictions in GMU 653 continue to benefit herd recovery in that unit. Hunters report a quality hunting experience and quality bulls for those fortunate enough to be drawn for the GMU 653 bull only permit hunt.



**Figure 4.** General season elk harvest in District 11.

The larger portion of each elk herd migrates down from high alpine meadows in Mount Rainier National Park to lowland winter range. Public lands and private commercial timberlands bordering the park are good areas. Hunters are encouraged to scout for elk leaving the Mount Rainier National Park and following the Carbon River northwards into the Clearwater Wilderness Area and the White River into the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest. Lands surrounding the Crystal Mountain Ski Resort (outside ski boundaries once ski season officially opens) offers good opportunity for high-elevation, rugged elk hunting with plenty of robust elk. The U.S. Forest Service (USFS), which permits the ski resort, wants to remind hunters that service roads built and maintained by Crystal Mountain Ski Resort are not open to the public, but hunters may ask for permission from the ski resort to haul out a harvested animal.

The Elbe Hills and Tahoma State Forests and the University of Washington Charles Lathrop Pack Experimental and Demonstration Forest (Pack Forest) in GMU 654 are good prospects for deer or elk and can be accessed by boot, bike, or horse during the general deer or elk season. Vehicle access during the hunting season in Elbe Hills is allowed only for hunters having a disabled access permit (see [Disabled Hunting](#) on the WDFW website. UW Pack Forest managers caution hunters to be aware of students conducting research in the forest any time of

the year. Maps of Elbe Hills and Tahoma State Forest, as well as other Washington Department of Natural Resource public lands in the South Puget Sound, can be found [online](#).

Sub-herds of the South Rainier elk herd continue to increase and expand on and around the Centralia Coal Mine and Skookumchuk Wildlife Area (GMU 667). Hunters are encouraged to scout the area from the [Skookumchuk Wildlife Area](#) south to the northern boundary of the Centralia Coal Mine (GMU 667). Hunting on the coal mine is only allowed under specialized permits, which require a mining escort (two senior and two disabled permit hunts, with five permits each, will be offered in 2016). Limited elk can occasionally be found and hunted on the West Rocky Prairie Wildlife Area in south Thurston County (GMU 666), on JBLM property in Pierce County (GMU 652), and off Delphi Road SW in western Thurston County (GMU 666). Elk cannot be hunted on property owned by USFWS in the Black River refuge of GMU 666 (formerly Weeks Dairy).

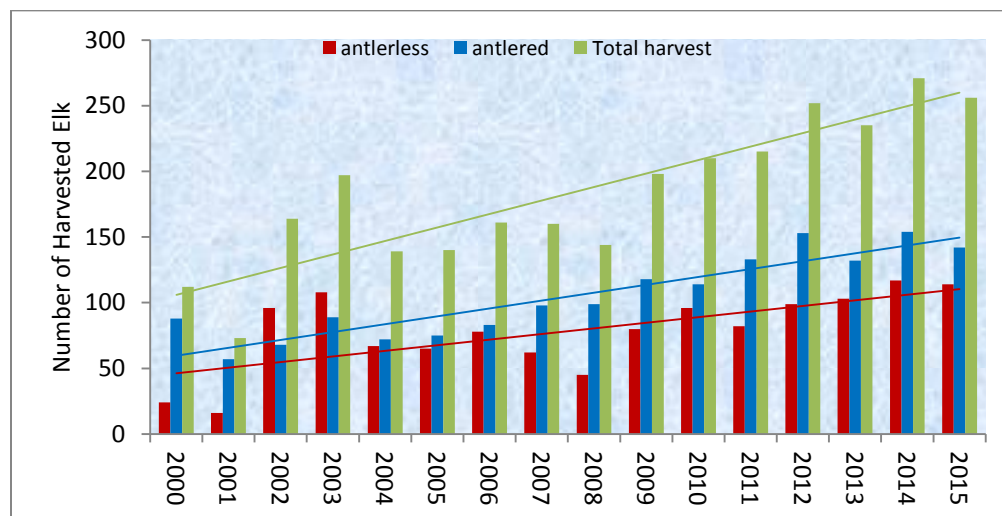


Elk group on the Enumclaw Plateau in GMU 652, District 11.

Elk continue to increase on private farmlands and properties in GMU 652 (around Graham, Buckley, and Enumclaw), GMU 667 (Yelm and Hanaford area), and GMU 666 (foothills of Capitol State Forest to Delphi Road SW and Waddell Creek Road SW). However, hunters must request permission to access private lands, and are encouraged to obtain permission weeks in advance of the season from the landowner (e.g. visit property and ask for permission). Elk Area 6013 in GMU 652 has been reduced in size to encompass primarily the Muckleshoot Indian Reservation, with several new hunting restrictions implemented in 2015 aimed at conserving elk for tribal purposes on the reservation. In response to increasing elk and elk-associated damage off-reservation in Buckley and Enumclaw, Elk Area 6014 provides a 3-point minimum or antlerless general modern firearm season, as well as three separate winter antlerless hunts, allowing 10 permits per hunt. Elk Area 6014 is comprised primarily of agricultural lands, hobby farms, and ranch homes, and supports approximately 100-150 total elk. Access to these properties is limited, and hunters interested in these hunts are encouraged to obtain access

permission prior to applying for these permits. A WDFW conflict specialist may be able to assist with suggesting landowners to contact.

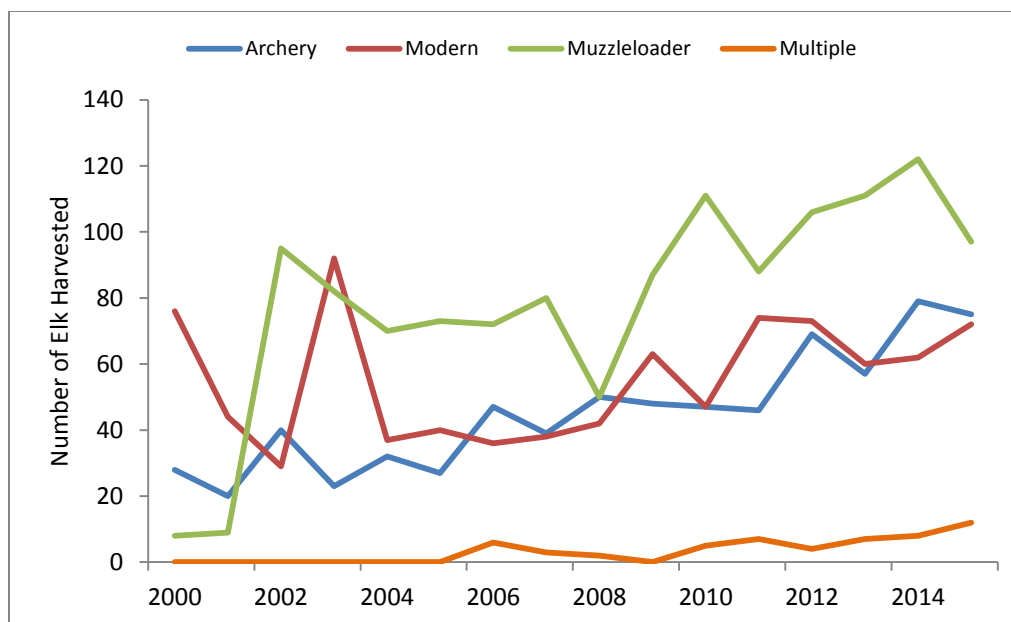
Three antlerless elk permit hunts for controlling private property damage are also provided in the Hanaford Elk Area 6069, with five permits each (a November, December, and January hunt). Finally, general Region 6 Master Hunter Elk Permits (hunt choice #2719 in 2016) are also available. Hunters drawn are often sent to damage properties in both the Buckley/Enumclaw and Hanaford area, as needed, and elsewhere in the region. Overall, elk are plentiful in these damage areas, with access onto private property being the primary limitation.



**Figure 5.** Number of harvested elk in Population Management Unit (PMU) 62 comprised of GMUs 652, 666, and 667.

General season elk harvest has been gradually increasing over the past several years for all weapons within GMUs 652, 666, and 667 (the western district GMUs more influenced by urbanization). This makes for good prospects for harvesting an elk in those GMUs in 2016. Muzzleloaders experienced the highest harvest and for many years the highest increasing trend in harvest in those GMUs, followed by archery and modern firearm.

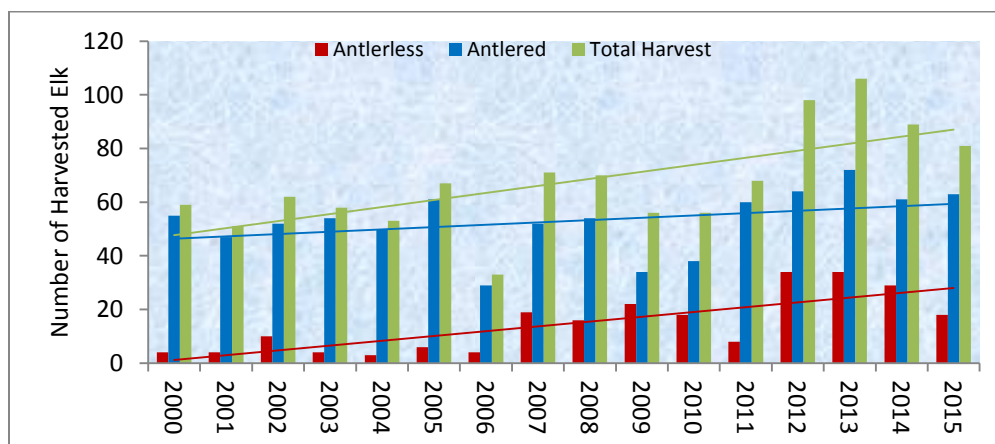




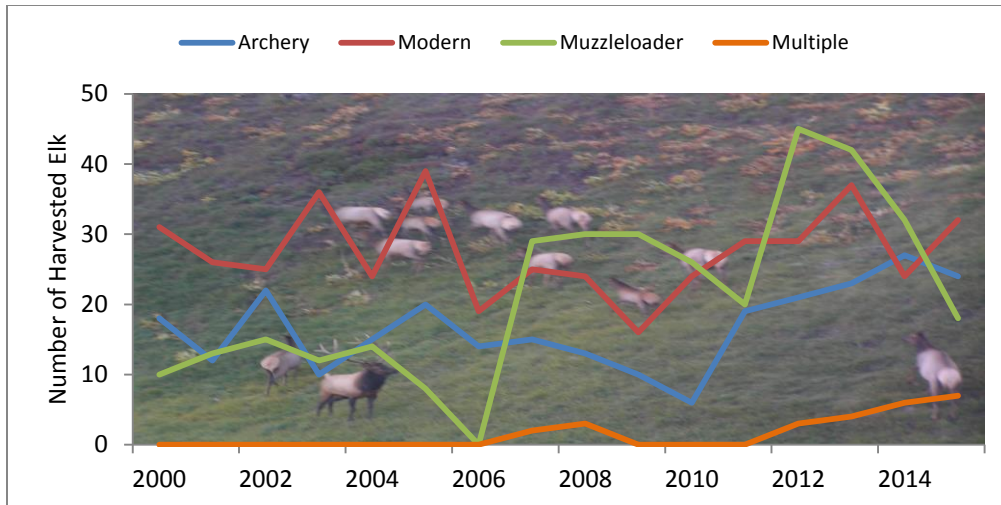
**Figure 6.** Elk harvest in PMU 62 comprised of GMUs 652, 666, and 667.

Although the overall harvest trend has been gradually increasing in GMUs 653 and 654 since 2000, muzzleloader harvest actually declined. This is partly reflected in changes in hunting regulation opportunity for muzzleloaders over the years, but is balanced by greater opportunity in other units.

Weyerhaeuser's Vail Tree Farm in GMU 667 and Hancock Timber Resources Group managed forestland (Kapowsin Tree Farm in GMU 654, Buckley Block in GMU 653, and White River Tree Farms owned by Muckleshoot Indian Tribe and managed by Hancock in GMU 653) all support elk, but require an access permit. Hunters can expect to continue to see good numbers of elk on Hancock managed properties, in particular in GMUs 653 and 654.

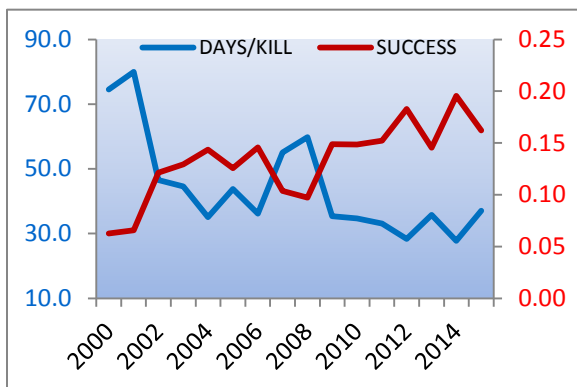


**Figure 7.** Number of harvested elk in PMU 67 (GMUs 653 and 654).

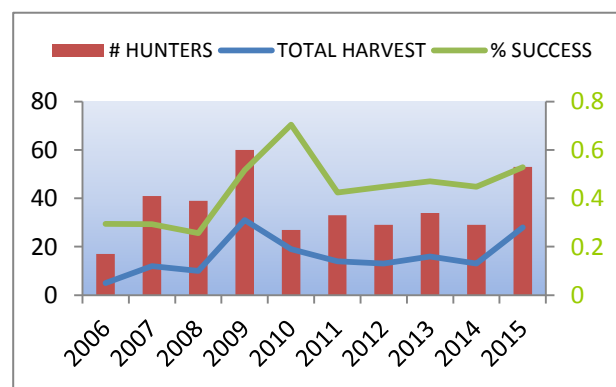


**Figure 8.** Elk harvest in PMU 67, comprised of GMUs 653 and 654.

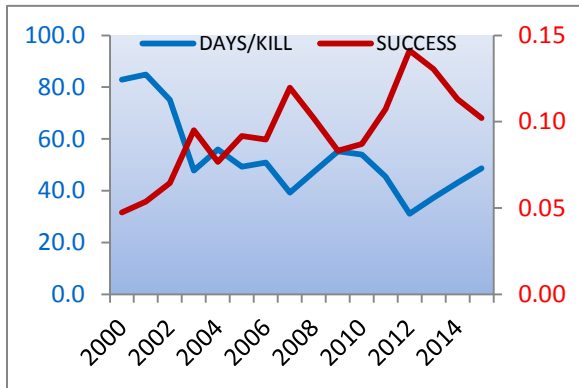
Hunter success as expressed by the number of days it took to harvest an animal is displayed in the following graphs for the five GMUs in District 11 supporting elk (G MU 655, Anderson Island, has no elk). Success has been generally increasing in most GMUs over the past 10 years. This is tracking elk population recovery in both the North Rainier and South Rainier elk herds. The exception is the Deschutes GMU 666, where access to hunting grounds is difficult due to the higher percentage of privately owned land. Regardless, success for hunters that have gained private land access in that GMU has remained stable, and thus prospects are good for those hunters obtaining access in 2016-17. Elk hunters are also generally less successful in GMU 667, which in general supports fewer elk than the northern GMUs. The bull only permit hunt in GMU 653 has the highest success rate in the district, averaging 40% since it began in 2006. This is a rugged, high alpine hunt, but worth the effort for those lucky enough to draw a permit.



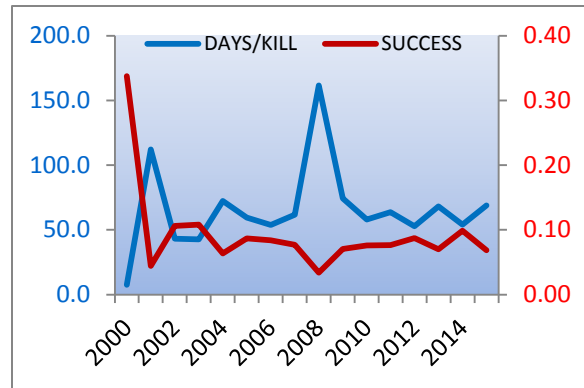
GMU 652 (all weapons)



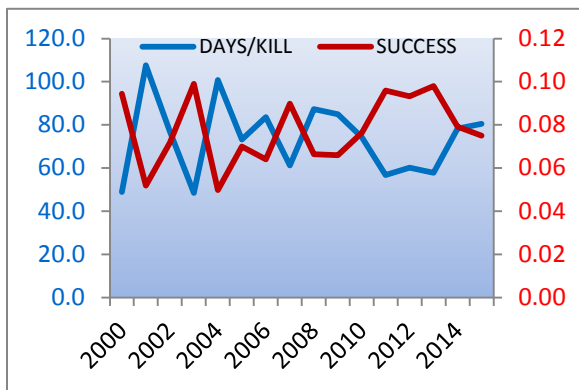
GMU 653 (bull permit only hunt)



GMU 654



GMU 666



GMU 667

## DEER



District biologist with successful deer hunter at Vail Tree Farm deer check station in the Skookumchuck Unit 667.

Black-tailed deer population surveys in District 11 are limited. Surveys are not done annually and when they are done, they have consisted of one survey done in the highest quality location (Vail Tree Farm). Commercial and state timberlands continue to provide the best opportunity for deer hunting. Hunters are encouraged to scout regenerating clear cuts. In particular, timberlands worthy of scouting for both deer and elk include the Vail Tree Farm (GMU 667) and Hancock Timber Resources Group managed properties (Kapowsin Tree Farm in GMU 654, Buckley Block in GMU 653, and White River Tree Farms owned by Muckleshoot Indian Tribe and managed by Hancock in GMU 653).

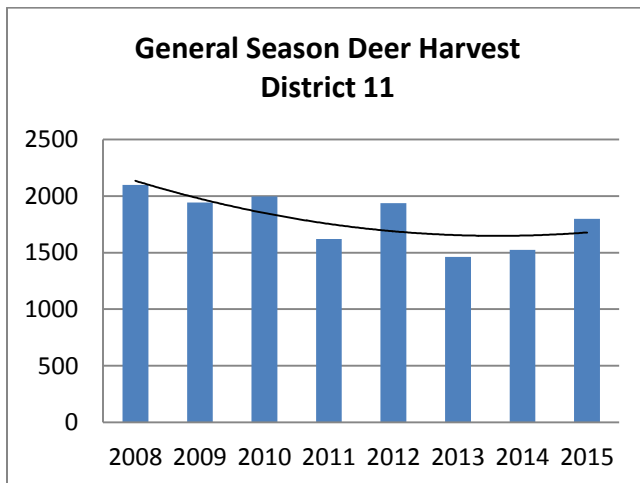
A limited access recreation program is in effect for Vail Tree Farm. Hunters are required by Weyerhaeuser to purchase an access permit in order to access Vail Tree Farm. Permits allow access year-round starting in 2016. All permits are sold out for the 2016-17 season. A maximum of 800 permits are annually provided for sale beginning in late May until December 31, or until sold out, to access the tree farm (approximately 159,000 acres) at a cost of \$300 per permit. Weyerhaeuser also offers three leases for exclusive access to three individual units ranging from 79 to 1,090 acres. These are up for bid, rather than general purchase, but are also sold out for this season. All forestry operations continue during the permit and lease season. Additional information can be found on the [Weyerhaeuser website](#) or by calling 866-636-6531.



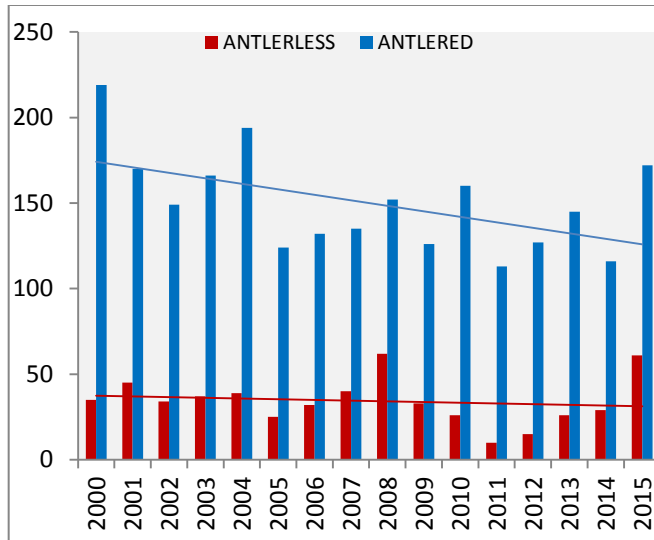
Hancock Timber Resources also requires a motorized access permit for the Kapowsin and Eatonville Tree Farms (owned by Hancock) and the White River Tree Farm (owned by Muckleshoot Indian Tribe but managed by Hancock) for access April 1, 2016 – March 30, 2017, with no access July 4-5 or during the elk bull season. Prices (total permits) for 2016-17 are as follows: **Kapowsin:** \$375 (1,200 permits), **Eatonville:** \$275 (300 permits), and **White River:** \$250 (500 permits). For more information on hunting or accessing areas on Hancock Timber Resource managed land, refer to their [website](#) or call 800-782-1493.

High elevation trophy black-tailed deer hunting experiences can be found in the eastern portions of GMUs 653 and 654 and are accessed by USFS road and trail systems that lead to high mountain hunting areas, including portions of the Norse Peak, Clearwater, and Glacier View Wilderness Areas and Crystal Mountain Resort (see the description under the elk section).

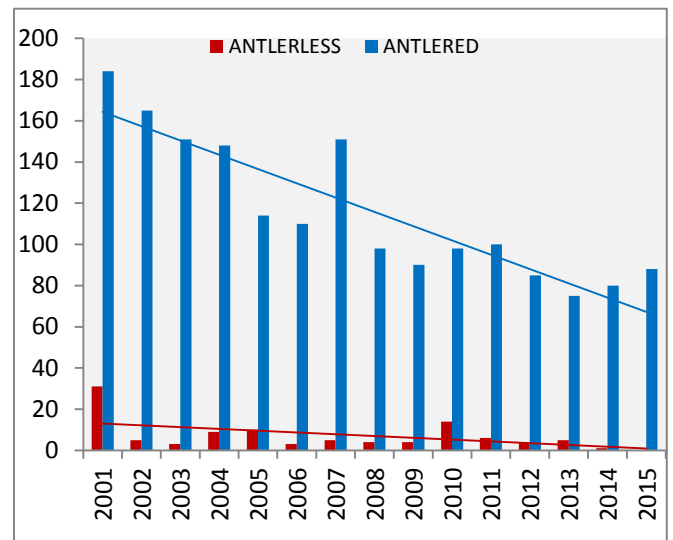
Deer harvest has been decreasing in most GMUs in District 11 since 2000, with the exception of GMU 654, which had an increase in harvest in 2015. Harvest regulations have altered somewhat in District 11 GMUs over the years, and harvest trends have been affected. However, there is a general consensus that overall deer harvest is decreasing throughout the district. GMU 667 harvest has remained constant over the last 10 years despite Weyerhaeuser's transition to a permit only access system on the Vail Tree Farm, which composes a bulk of that unit's harvest. Anderson Island was previously Deer Area 6014 and had antlerless permit hunts only. The entire island became GMU 655 in 2013, and has since provided both general season (either sex) and antlerless permit hunts (55 permits in 2015). Ferry logistics and property access reduce the actual harvest despite plentiful deer on the island.



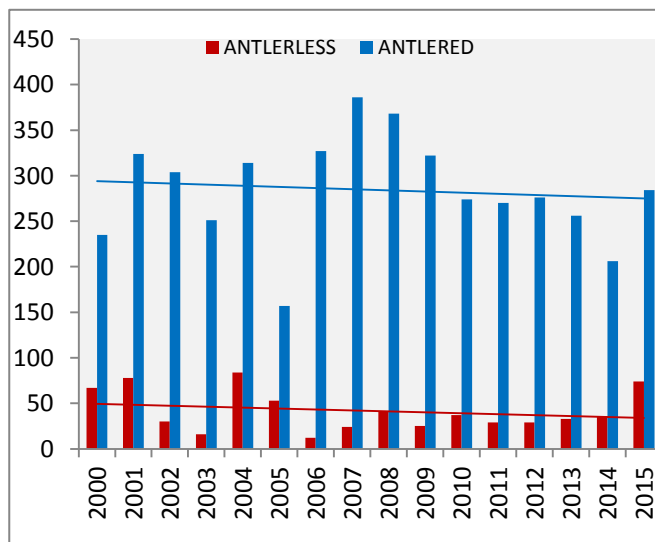
**Figure 9.** General season deer harvest in District 11.



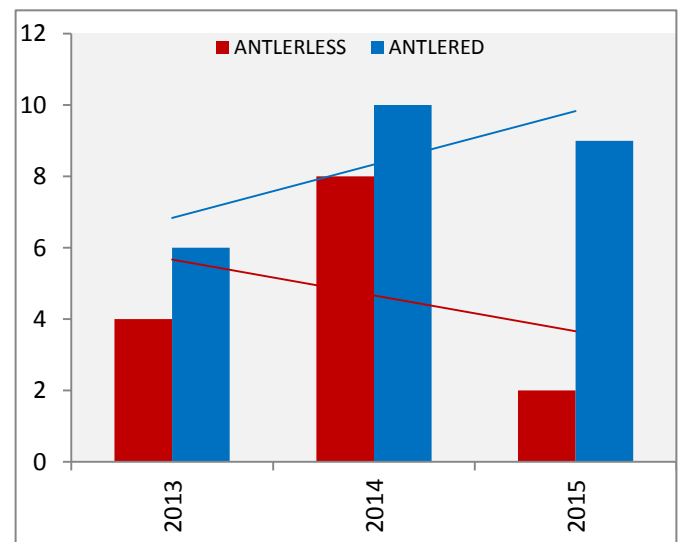
GMU 652 (all weapons)



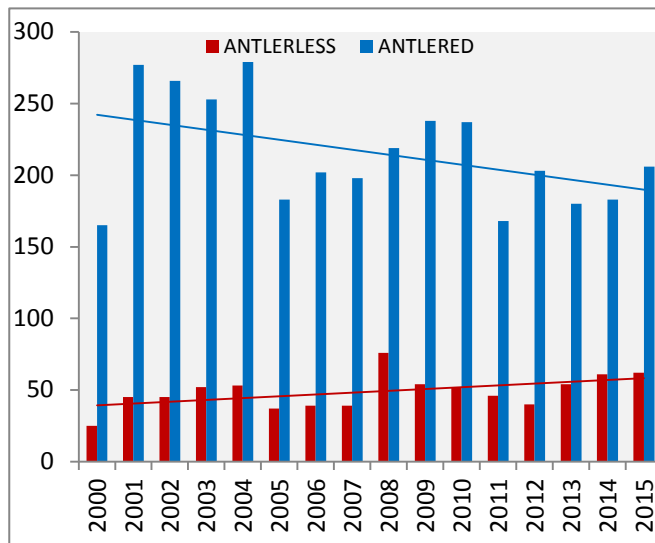
GMU 653



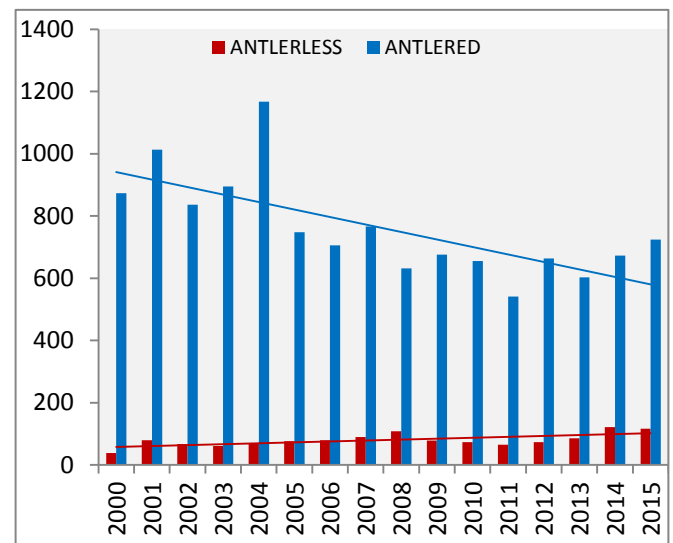
GMU 654



GMU 655



GMU 666

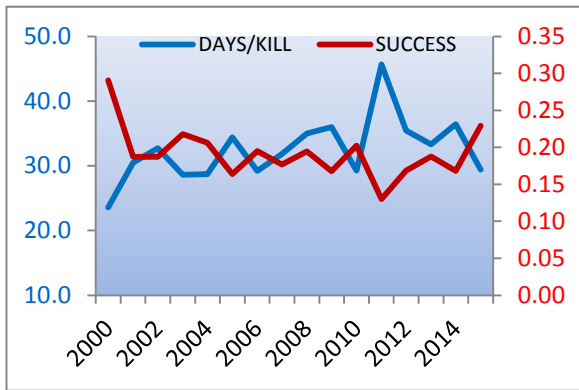


GMU 667

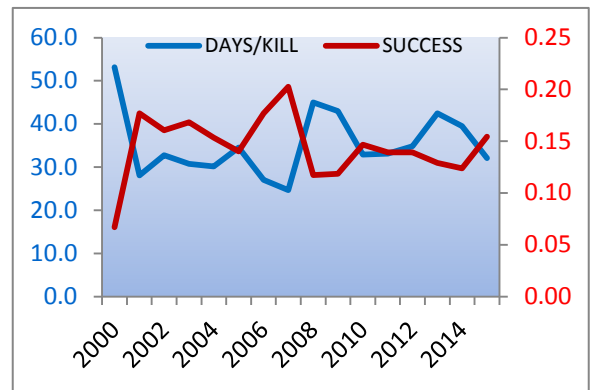


Opening day modern firearm season [SM Sgt. S. Tkach III (Ret), 2015].

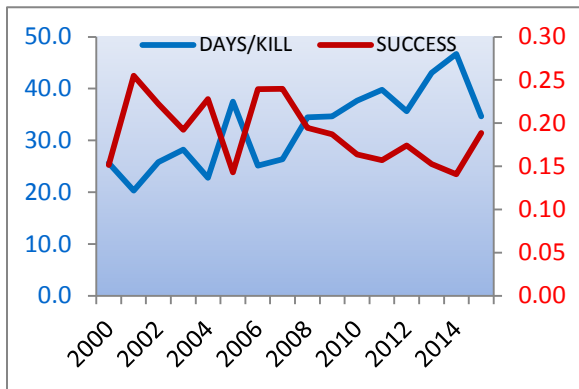
Despite a decreasing trend in harvest, hunter success rates remained stable in GMUs 652, 653, and 654, hovering around 15-20 percent, while rates have increased since 2012 in GMUs 666 and 667. The best prospects in District 11 in terms of success rates are in GMUs 655 and 667.



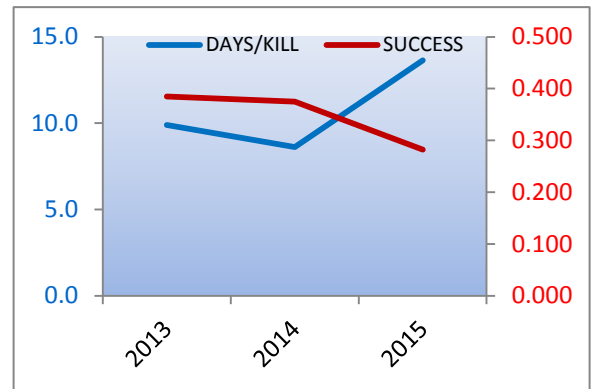
GMU 652 (all weapons)



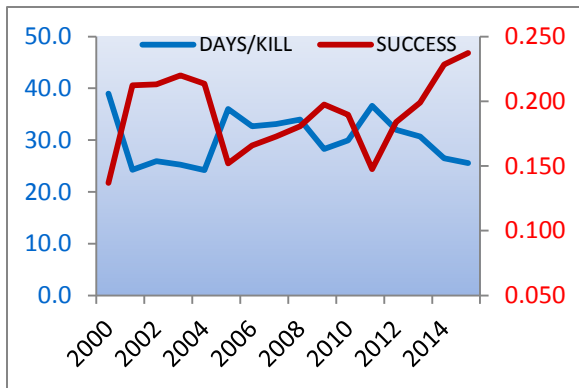
GMU 653



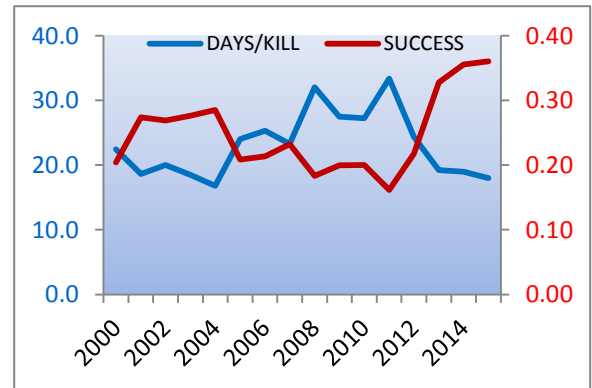
GMU 654



GMU 655



GMU 666



GMU 667



## BEAR

District 11 holds GMUs in two Black Bear Management Units (BBMUs): Puget Sound (GMU 652, 666, and 667) and South Cascades (GMU 653 and 654). Each of these BBMUs also contains additional GMUs outside the boundaries of District 11. A bear season is not provided in GMU 655. There is opportunity within District 11 to hunt bear both in the fall general and spring special permit hunting seasons. However, overall trends in both hunts have been declining, and prospects in the district may not be as good as previous years.

Commercial and state timberlands continue to provide the best availability for bear hunting. Hunters are encouraged to scout for signs (scat and tree bark peeling) in regenerating timber stands. Vail Tree Farm (GMU 667), Hancock Timber Resources Group managed lands (Kapowsin Tree Farm in GMU 654 and Buckley and White River Tree Farms in GMU 653), Capitol State Forest (GMU 663), Elbe Hills and Tahoma State Parks (GMU 654), and Joint Base Lewis McChord offer the best prospects for bear hunters in the district (access permit requirements for Weyerhaeuser and Hancock properties are in effect).

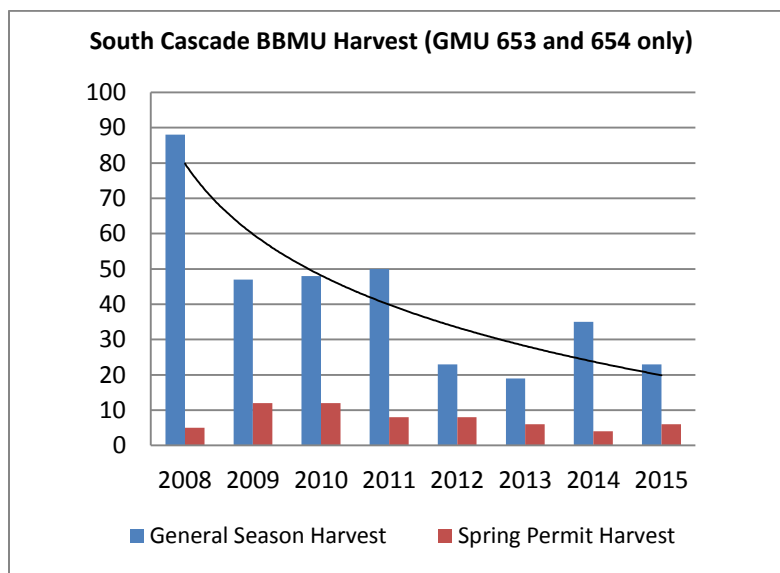


First big game harvest (S. Holznagel, 2014)

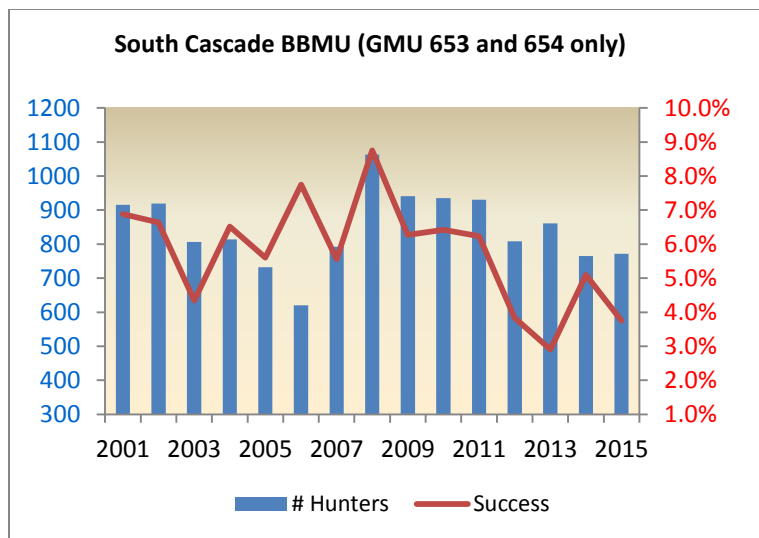
A spring black bear special permit season is provided on Hancock's Kapowsin Tree Farm in GMUs 653/654 within the South Cascades BBMU. A total of 150 permits for the April 15-June 15 season will be available once again in 2017. Those successfully drawn for a hunt permit must also purchase a vehicle access permit from Hancock. A spring bear season vehicle access permit

is available from Hancock for all drawn permittees to hunt only the permit area at the cost of \$100.

General season bear harvest trends in the District 11 portion of the South Cascades BBMU (e.g. GMUs 653 and 654) have been generally declining over the past several years. A noticeable decline in harvest took place from 2008 to 2009, and again from 2011 to 2012 (46% decline), and harvest has remained low. Twenty-nine bears were harvested in 2015 in GMUs 653 and 654 of the South Cascades BBMU. Although the number of bear hunters in these combined GMUs has remained stable, hunter success rates are declining. Collectively, this does not suggest good prospects for hunting bear during the general season in GMUs 653 and 654 in 2016-17.

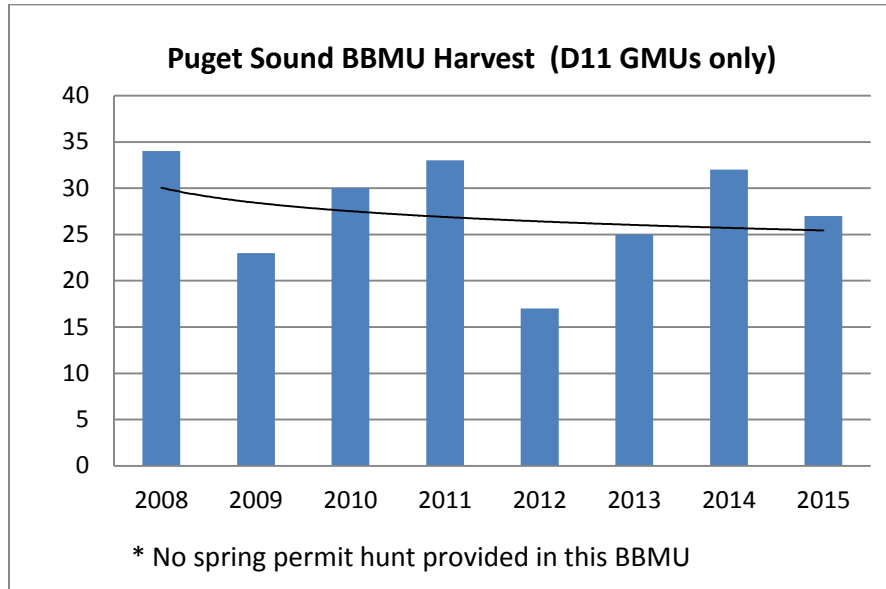


**Figure 10.** South Cascade BBMU harvest (GMU 653 and 654 only).

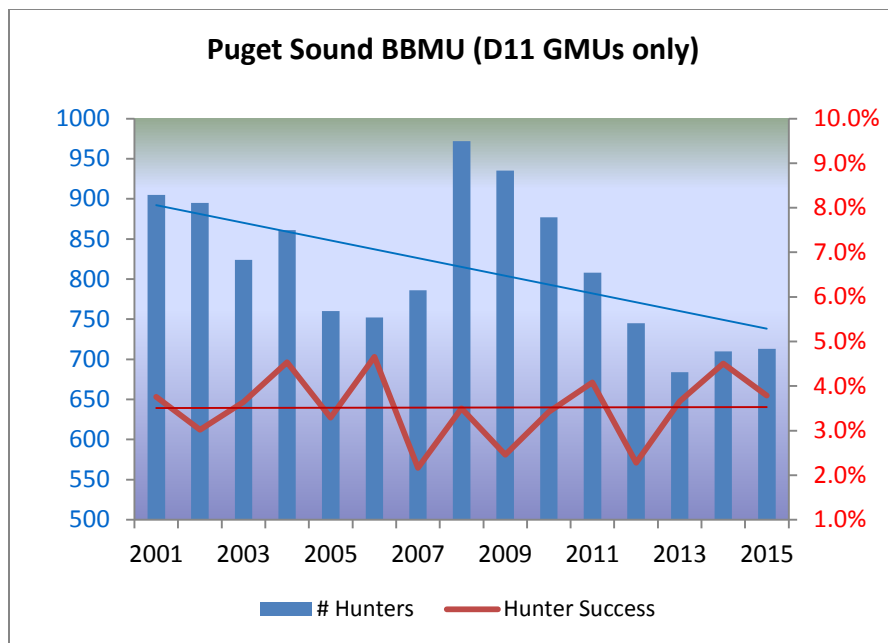


**Figure 11.** South Cascade BBMU hunter success rates 2001-2015.

The GMUs of the Puget Sound BBMU that are within District 11 (e.g. GMUs 652, 666, 667) are also showing a weak declining general season trend over the past several years, but have shown signs of improving since a low in 2012. The number of hunters hunting this BBMU has declined, but those that remain have improving success rates. Both BBMUs in District 11 are hovering around a 4-5% success rate per hunter, which should continue into 2017.

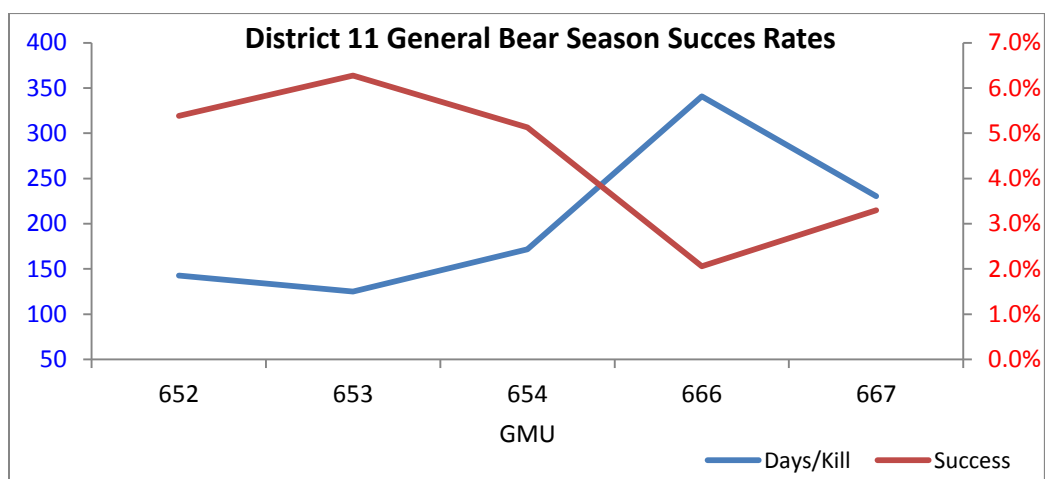


**Figure 12.** Puget Sound BBMU harvest (District 11 GMUs only).



**Figure 13.** Puget Sound BBMU hunter success rates 2001-2015.

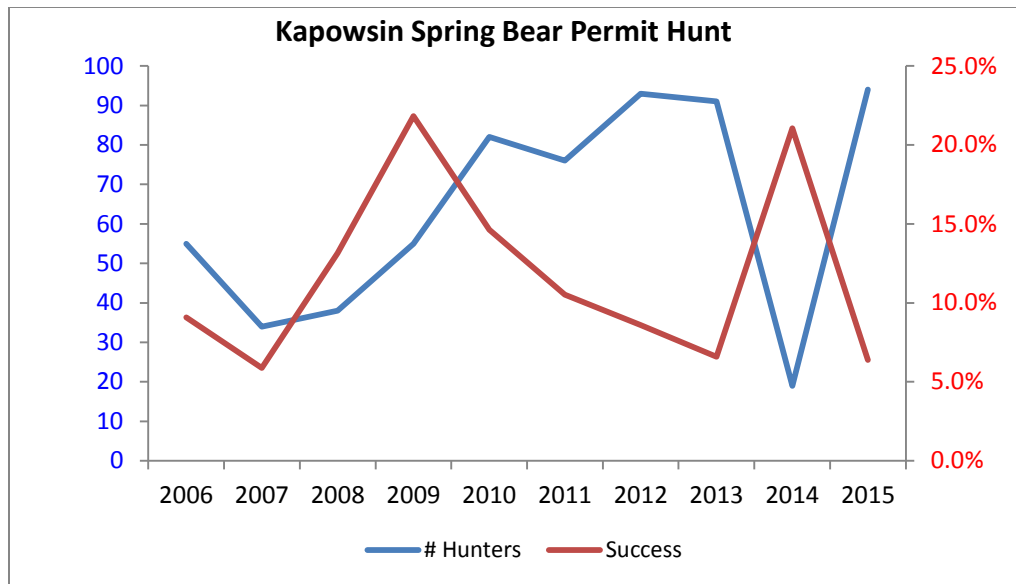
Comparing success rates of general bear season in District 11 over the past 15 years, GMUs 653 and 652 have the highest success and thus the best chance of harvesting black bear.



**Figure 14.** District 11 general bear season success rates.

Ninety-four hunters successfully harvested six black bears in 2015, of the 150 permits that were issued under the Kapowsin spring permit hunt, for a hunter success rate of 6.4%, significantly down from the 21.1% in 2014 and the 22% statewide average for spring bear hunts in 2015. The 10-year average success rate for this hunt is 12 percent. This is in the lower half in terms of success of the 18 spring bear permits offered statewide.





**Figure 15.** Kapowsin spring bear permit hunter success rates 2006-2015.

## COUGAR

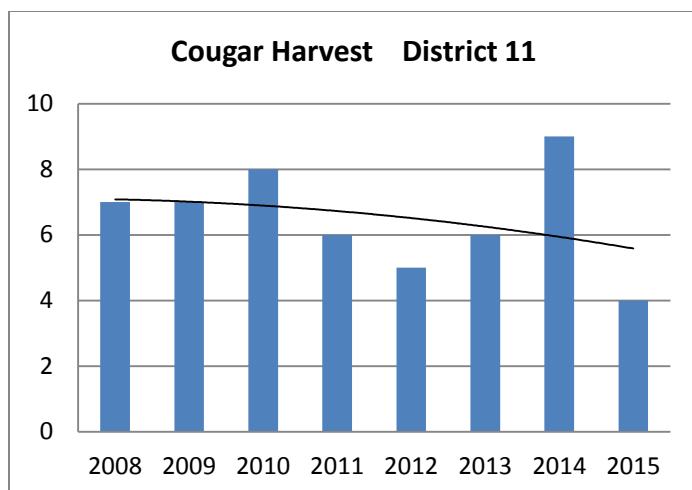
Cougars are widespread in the forest lands of District 11. Areas supporting high numbers of deer and elk also provide great opportunity for cougars. District 11 comprises three cougar population management units (CPMUs) made up of GMUs containing similar habitats and having similar cougar population objectives. These GMUs are 652/666, 653/654, and GMU 667 (cougar hunting is not provided in GMU 655).

WDFW changed the cougar hunting season design in 2012 to a liberalized season coupled with harvest guidelines (see [wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/cougar](http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/cougar)). Two general cougar seasons are offered:

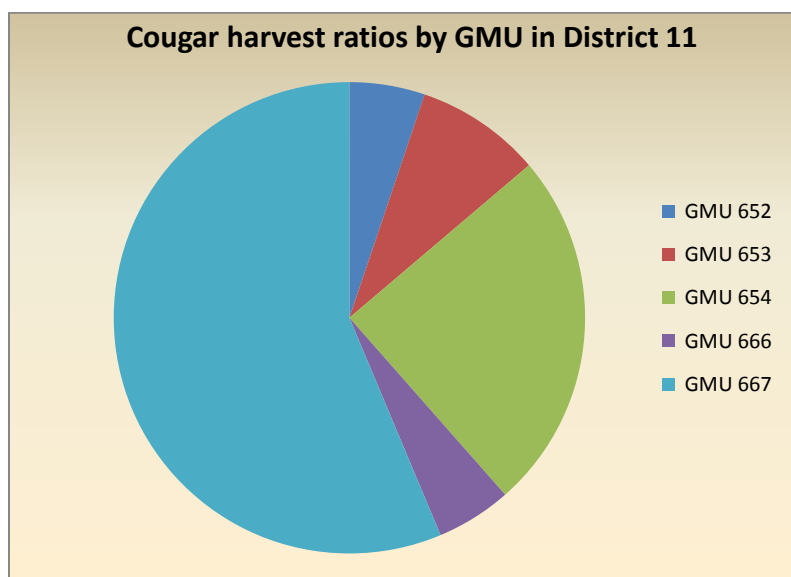
- Early: Sept. 1 - Dec. 31, 2016.
- Late: Jan. 1 - Apr. 30, OR when the harvest guideline is reached, whichever occurs first.

Be aware that a 2017 cougar license/tag is required to hunt cougar in April 2017. GMUs 652 and 666 have no quota limit, GMUs 653 and 654 have a quota of five cougars (combined), and GMU 667 has a quota of three or four cougar (meaning at three, WDFW determines if other non-hunting forms of mortality have occurred and may close the season) in 2016-17.

A significant increase in cougar harvest in District 11 occurred in 2014, but then dropped to the lowest rate in eight years in 2015. A total of four cougars was reported harvested in the district in 2015 (not including tribal). The Skookumchuck (GMU 667) annually provides the highest cougar harvest in the district and one of the highest in western Washington. Thus, prospects for hunting cougar in the district are very good.



**Figure 16.** Cougar harvest in District 11 2008-2015.



**Figure 17.** Cougar harvest ratios by GMU in District 11.

## WATERFOWL

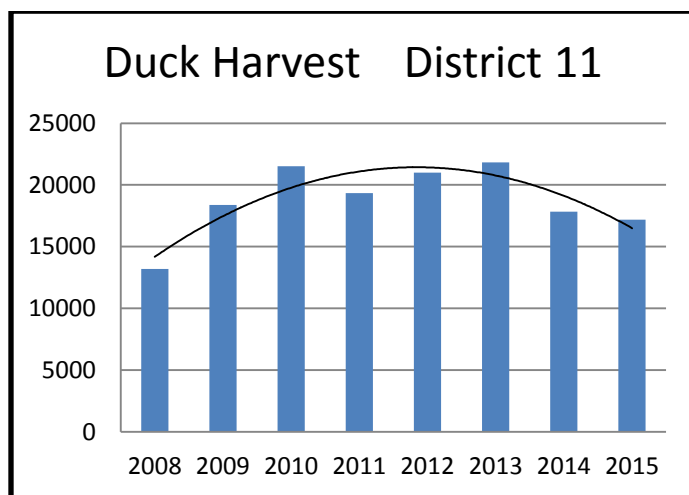
The majority of [Pacific Flyway](#) waterfowl are born on the prairies of the United States and Canada, as well as in Alaska, northwestern Canada, and other western states. With the exception of 2013, waterfowl numbers have been on the upswing in the United States and that trend continued in 2015. According to USFWS, the total duck population (includes freshwater and saltwater species) as counted on traditional survey areas was 49.5 million breeding ducks, which is similar to the 2014 estimate of 49.2 million and 43% higher than the long-term average. However, waterfowl breeding population estimates due out in August are expected to be lower than recent years (but still higher than the long-term average) due to extreme flooding/water levels and high breeding season temperatures in 2015-16.

Annual waterfowl breeding population estimates are released late summer annually by USFWS (2016 estimates not available at the time of this writing). Several species commonly found in District 11 remained stable from 2014 to 2015 in the primary North American breeding areas as follows (USFWS information can be found [here](#)):

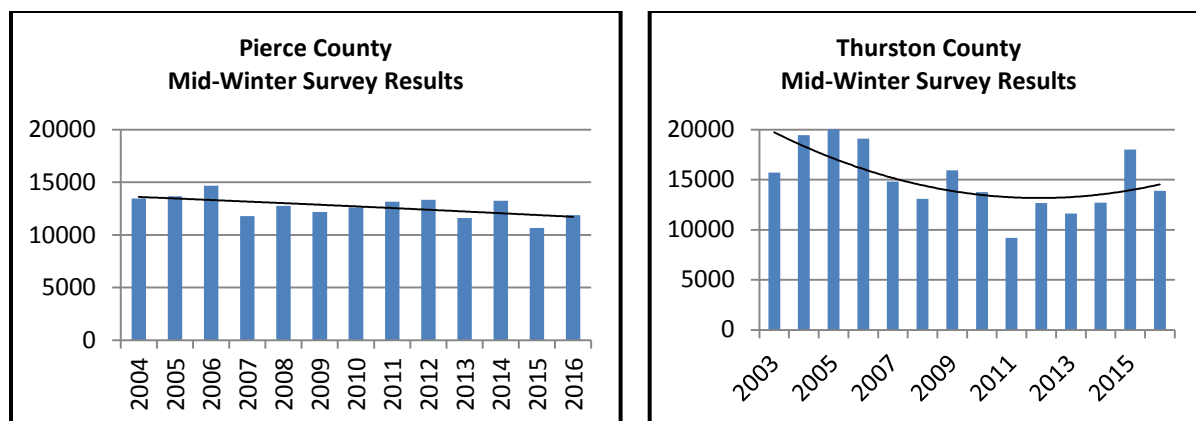
**Table 1.** Breeding population trends in waterfowl species 2014-2015.

Species	Breeding Population Estimate Trend
Mallard	similar to 2014, but up 51% over long-term average
Green-winged teal	similar to the 2014 estimate and 69% above the long-term average
Gadwall	19% above the 2014 estimate and 98% above the long-term average
American widgeon	similar to 2014, but up 17% over long-term average
Northern shovelers	similar to 2014 estimates and 114% above the long-term average
Northern pintails	similar to the 2014 estimate and 24% below the long-term average
Scaup (combined)	similar to the 2014 estimate and 13% below the long-term average

Duck harvest in District 11 has been declining over the past two years. Thurston County supports more waterfowl than Pierce County, primarily as a result of Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually Wildlife Refuge and other Puget Sound inlets. Mid-winter waterfowl counts have declined across both counties since the early 2000s, but have begun to improve in Thurston County over the past two years. Thurston County surveys in 2016 were affected by heavy fog, and numbers are likely higher than reported here, perhaps continuing that increasing trend. The best prospects for waterfowl hunters in District 11 are in Thurston County.

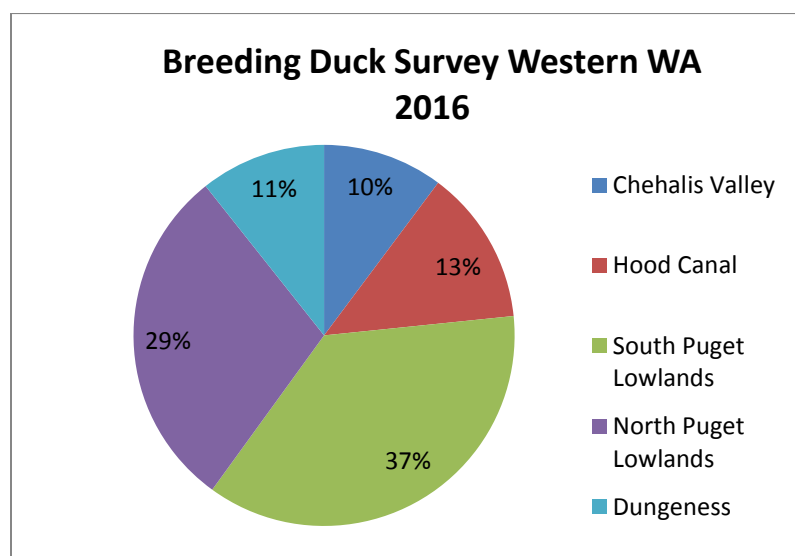


**Figure 18.** District 11 duck harvest.

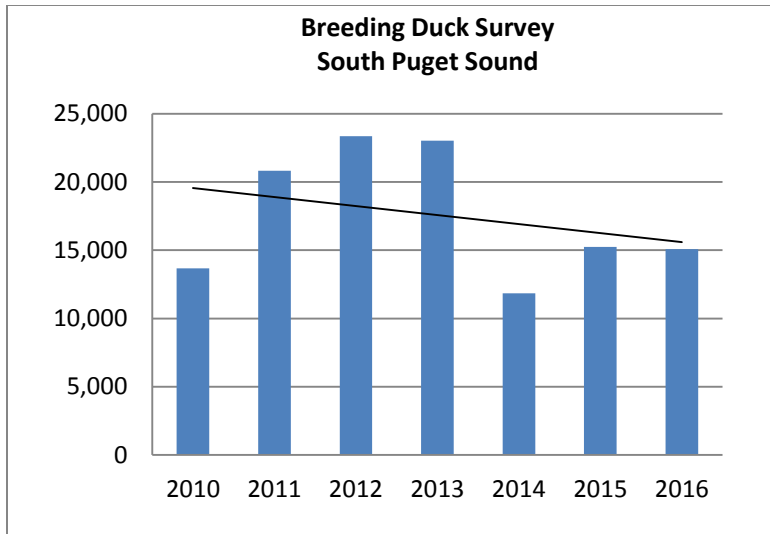


**Figure 19.** Mid-winter survey results for Pierce and Thurston counties 2003-2016.

The South Puget Sound lowlands supported the highest percent of breeding ducks in western Washington according to the 2016 breeding duck surveys. Breeding season duck survey results remain low across western Washington compared to the seven year average. This may be attributed to an earlier than normal spring migration and nest season in 2014, which resulted in a reduction in migratory waterfowl visible during the survey window rather than a true reduction in waterfowl. According to the WDFW Waterfowl Specialist, dry conditions during the 2015 breeding season likely resulted in lower productivity and ducks seen in 2016.

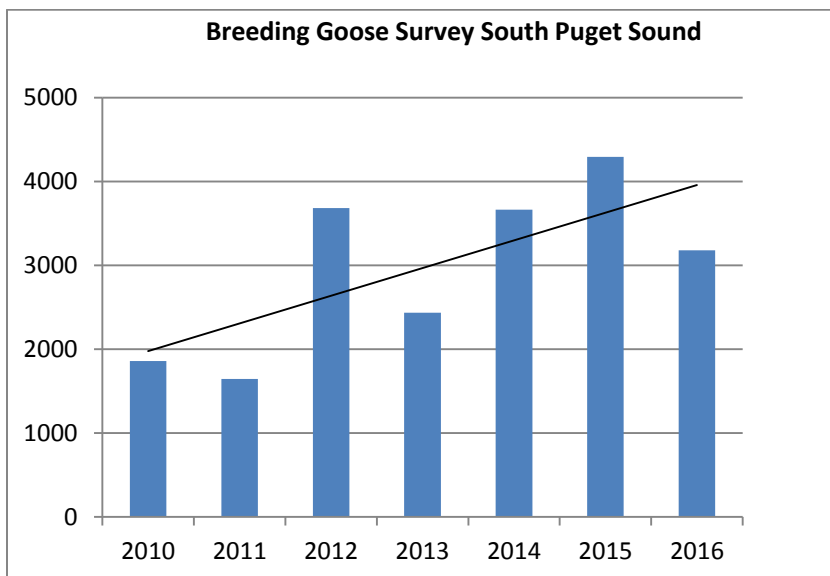


**Figure 20.** Breeding duck survey in western Washington 2016.



**Figure 21.** South Puget Sound breeding duck survey results 2010-2016.

Goose breeding survey results have continued to increase across the South Puget Sound since 2010, and despite a slight decrease in 2016, prospects for goose hunting in District 11 should remain good.



**Figure 22.** South Puget Sound breeding goose survey results 2010-2016.



Young hunter with her collections in the blind – Photo by T. Frank, West Richland, WA

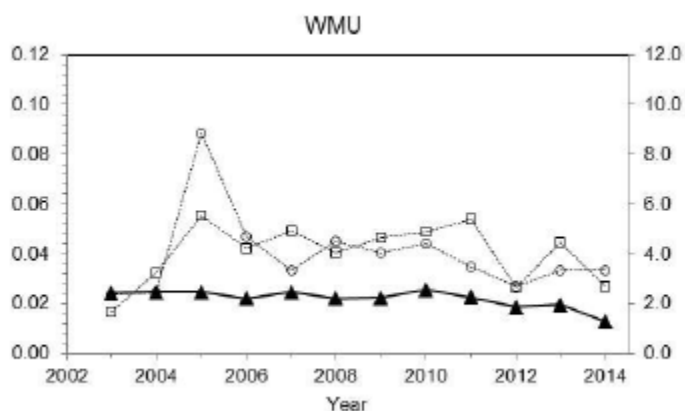
Hunting violations in the district remain a concern on small water bodies surrounded by housing. Hunters are urged to obey all hunting regulations at such sites to avoid potential future closures. All bodies of water are open for hunting unless located within a county firearm restriction area (see introduction). Rapjohn Lake in Pierce County has a register-to-hunt program and requires hunters to hunt from two established blinds. Registration for the blinds is on a first come basis, and is established by parking in one of the two mandatory parking lots at the WDFW Rapjohn Lake Access Site.

The best waterfowl hunting areas include the [Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually Wildlife Refuge](#), Puget Sound marine inlets associated with western islands of Pierce County, Henderson, Budd, and Eld Inlets of Thurston County, and Centralia Mine in Lewis County. Flooded agricultural fields in the western half of the district can be good prospects for waterfowl hunting, but hunters must seek landowner access permission prior to hunting these sites. Note that a majority of the water bodies on Key Peninsula, Pierce County, are within a firearm restriction zone, thus prohibiting waterfowl hunting. The Centralia Coal Mine has a limited, high quality hunt. Hunters are urged to contact TransAlta directly with questions regarding participation (360-736-9901). For information on hunting the Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually Wildlife Refuge, go [online](#) or call (360) 753-9467.

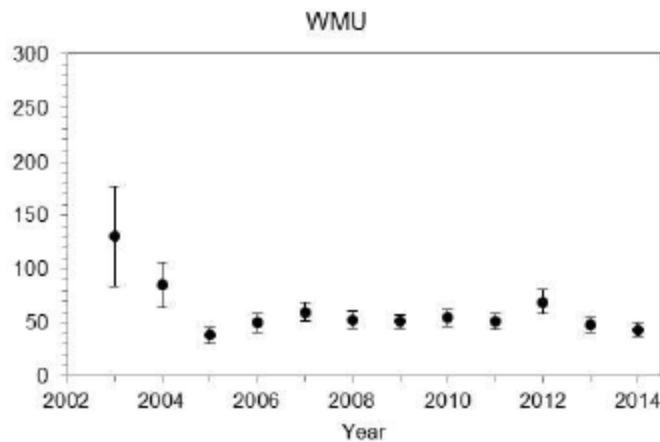


## MOURNING DOVE

The Department uses the annual USFWS Mourning Dove Population Status Report to analyze trends in mourning dove populations. The report summarizes trends in the number of doves heard and seen per route from the all-bird Breeding Bird Survey (BBS), and provides absolute abundance estimates based on band recovery and harvest data. Harvest and hunter participation are estimated from the Migratory Bird Harvest Information Program (HIP). BBS data suggested that the abundance of mourning doves over the last 49 years decreased in the Western Management Units, which is composed of the seven western states, including Washington. Estimates of absolute abundance varied among management units in 2014, with the Western Management Unit having the fewest amount of doves nationally at 43,697,391 (SE=3,252,203). Approximately  $1,265,000 \pm 52,600$  birds were harvested by 102,300 dove hunters across the Western Management Unit. Hunters reported  $261,800 \pm 10,500$  days spent afield hunting doves. The 2016 report is not available at the time of this writing.

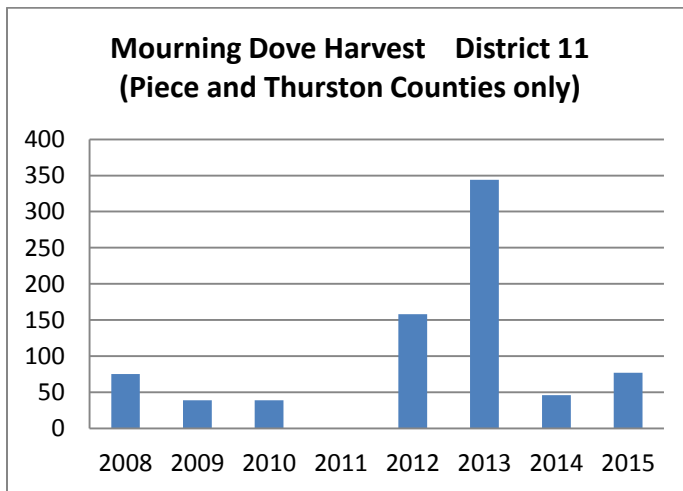


**Figure 23.** Estimated harvest (▲) and harvest rates of mourning dove 2003–2014 in the Western Management Unit. Harvest rates are presented separately for hatch-year (■) and after-hatch-year (●) (USFWS 2015).



**Figure 24.** Estimates and 95% confidence intervals of mourning dove absolute abundance in the Western Management Unit, 2003–2014. Estimates based on band recovery and harvest data (USFWS 2015).

District 11 is not a prime dove hunting area in Washington and averages approximately 100 doves harvested per year. A significant increase in dove hunting was reported by hunters in the district in 2013, but numbers returned to normal in 2014 and 2015. Lewis County traditionally provides higher harvest numbers, with Thurston and Pierce County providing lower rates. In 2015, harvest was 365, 44, and 33 for Lewis, Thurston, and Pierce counties, respectively. The best prospects for hunting dove in District 11 are in Lewis County.

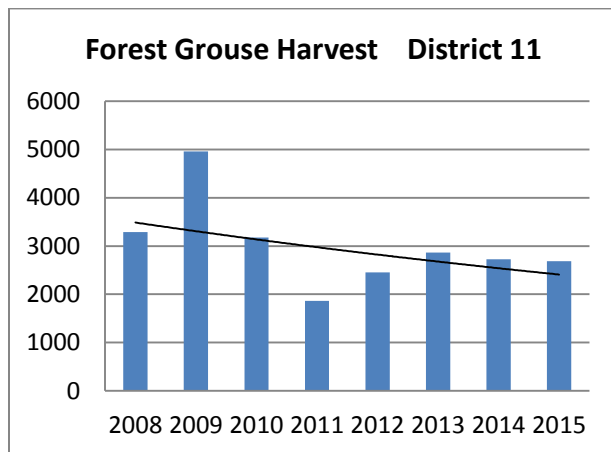


**Figure 25.** District 11 mourning dove harvest 2008-2015 (Pierce and Thurston counties only).

## FOREST GROUSE

Ruffed and sooty (formerly classified as blue) grouse are present throughout the public and private forest lands in District 11. The prospects for harvesting sooty grouse go up with increasing elevation. Hunters can expect the greatest success along logging roads, trails, and ridgelines above 2,000-3,000 feet, and within Pacific silver fir and noble fir forest stands. The best hunting will be near fruiting shrublands, such as huckleberry, grouse whortleberry, elderberry, and other species. Logging roads are particularly good locations, since they provide the sand that grouse need to eat for digestion and the dust grouse seek to discourage mites and other biting infestations. In particular, look for inaccessible or closed roads and walk behind gates (with permission by owner) to get the best chance of finding grouse.

Hunters targeting ruffed grouse should focus on elevations below 2,500 feet, particularly in riparian forest habitats, early seral forests (5-25 years old), and deciduous-conifer mixed forest types. Prime forest grouse hunting may be found on JBLM (GMU 652), Weyerhaeuser's Vail Tree Farm (GMU 667), and Capitol State Forest (GMU 663). Forest grouse harvest continues to trend downward in District 11, as it has over the past eight years. Removing the 2009 spike, an average of 2,700 grouse is harvested annually in the district. The best prospects for hunting grouse in District 11 are in Lewis County, followed by Pierce and then Thurston counties.



**Figure 26.** District 11 forest grouse harvest 2008-2015.

A hunter must purchase either a big game license or a small game license to hunt grouse. Grouse hunting is included in the purchase of any big game license purchase. Forest grouse season in District 11 runs September 1 through December 31, with a combined daily bag limit of four, to include not more than three of any one species and a possession limit of 12 (to include not more than nine blue grouse, nine spruce grouse, or nine ruffed grouse).

## PHEASANT

Western Washington does not support self-sustaining populations of pheasants, primarily due to the wetter climate and lack of grain farming. Hunting pheasant on the west side of the state is dependent upon releases of pheasants in the fall. District 11 is fortunate to contain three of the 24 pheasant release sites in western Washington. For that reason, pheasant hunters continue to have great prospects for harvesting pheasant in this district. In addition, the pheasant production game farm for western Washington is within District 11. This means that pheasants are released directly from WDFW (versus the network of collaborators used across the state) and the shorter distance means less travel time, stress, and fatigue for the birds prior to release. According to our pheasant production manager, this equates to more consistency and stronger birds at release, which should improve hunting opportunity for District 11 hunters.

Game farm pheasants will be released this fall on sites which are mapped on the [GoHunt](#) website and in the [Western Washington Pheasant Program Booklet](#).

The release program utilizes state (Scatter Creek and Skookumchuck) and federal (JBLM) managed lands. There are special access processes in place for [JBLM](#), so please visit their web site. Note that [non-toxic shot](#) is required on all pheasant release sites statewide. The general



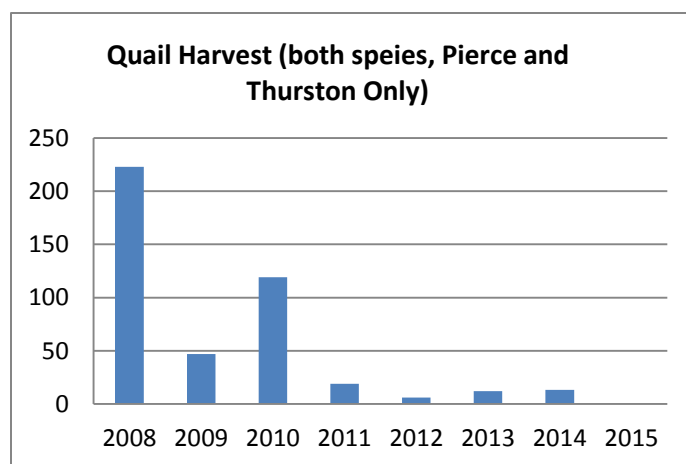
pheasant season is open from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., September 24 to November 30, 2016, with a daily bag limit of two (either sex) and a possession limit of 15 (either sex). An extended pheasant season is also provided in District 11 at the Skookumchuck and Scatter Creek wildlife areas and JBLM release sites from December 1-15 under the same hours and daily/possession limits as general season. Pheasants are **not** released as part of the extended season. Hunters need a western Washington pheasant license to hunt pheasants. An overview of the Western Washington Pheasant Release Program, including a description and maps of all release sites, can be found on the [WDFW website](#).

Pheasant production in western Washington will be similar to last year, with an estimated 39,000 pheasants to be released in 24 pheasant release areas. Be aware that total production could still be affected by high temperatures and other mortalities in 2016, and these are estimates only. Approximately 1,500 pheasants (5% of total production) will be released at the Skookumchuck Wildlife Area this season, with 50-75 birds released each day on Saturdays, Sundays, and Wednesdays, beginning September 17 through Thanksgiving Day morning. Approximately 4,000 pheasants (11% of total production) will be released at the Scatter Creek Wildlife Area, with 60-70 birds released each day on Saturdays, Sundays, and Wednesdays. Some areas of

Scatter Creek are off limits to hunters due to endangered species recovery work, so please obey all posted signs. Approximately 4,000 pheasants (11% of total production) will be released on JBLM. Military training dictates which fields will be open in any given week for both release and hunting access on JBLM. Hunters must register to hunt on JBLM through Northwest Adventure Center (253-967-8282 or 253-967-7744), at which time they will be informed about the pheasant hunting process, including which fields are open for hunting.

## QUAIL

Quail are as limited in District 11 as they are throughout western Washington. Quail harvest in District 11 has been trending downwards since a seven year high in 2008. The 2014 harvest was similar to 2013 (13 vs 12 quail reported harvested), with all quail harvested in Pierce County, which has not reported a harvest for the previous three years. No quail were harvested in District 11 in 2015. Regardless of this downward trend, quail harvest in the district is not significantly lower than the other 10 counties in western Washington that support quail hunting. California quail can be found in scattered locations throughout District 11, with the greatest opportunity in grasslands and woodlands of south and east Thurston County and northern Lewis County. Mountain quail are more prevalent in the brushy areas of the Key Peninsula, Pierce County, and southeast portions of Thurston County. Where private property access is limited, seek out state (WDNR) and private forestland. Combined quail harvest in District 11 is traditionally highest in Lewis County, followed by Thurston and then Pierce. The western Washington California (valley) quail season runs September 24 through November 30, with a daily mixed bag limit of 10 and possession mixed bag limit of 30. The mountain quail season runs September 24 through November 30, with a daily bag limit of two and possession limit of four.

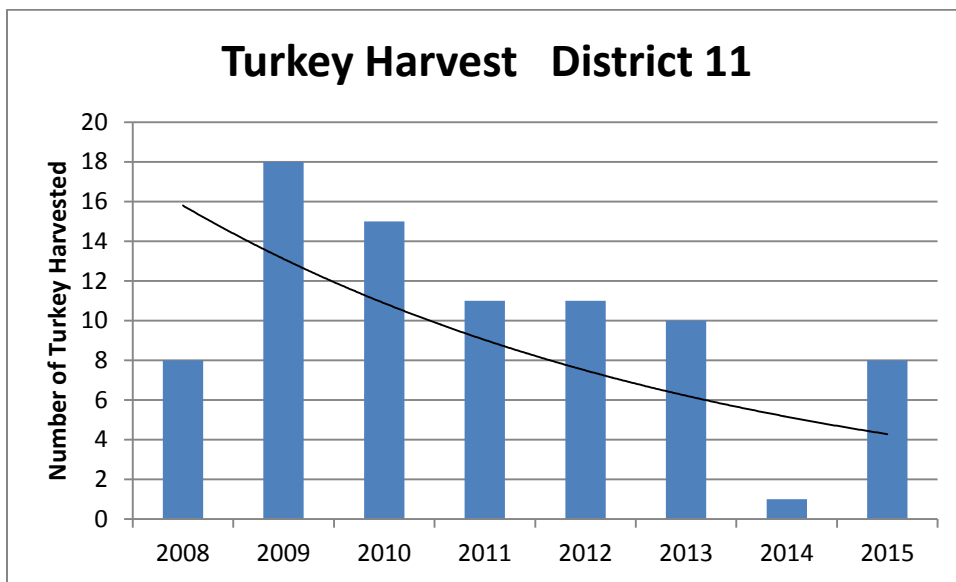


**Figure 27.** Quail harvest in Pierce and Thurston counties 2008-2015.

## TURKEY

District 11 is not managed for wild turkeys and the species remains relatively rare. Regardless, there are huntable populations of the eastern sub-species of wild turkey in Thurston County. Eight turkeys were harvested in District 11 in 2015, with seven from GMU 667 and one from GMU 652.

Although 50 hunters reported hunting turkey in District 11 in 2014, only one turkey was reported harvested in the district (GMU 667). This was a significant decline from the average harvest of six per year across the district. WDFW receives occasional reports of individual or small groups of turkeys in Gig Harbor and Key Peninsula in Pierce County, Rochester in Thurston County, and along the Johnson Creek Corridor in Lewis County. However, the overall scarcity of turkeys in District 11 equates to extremely poor prospects for harvest. Annually, the majority of turkey harvest occurs in the Skookumchuck Unit (GMU 667), followed by a few in Deschutes (GMU 666). The statewide turkey season runs April 15 thru May 31 in any given year, with a youth-only hunt the first weekend of April. Only male turkeys and turkeys with visible beards are legal, with a western Washington limit of one (except two turkey limit in Klickitat County).

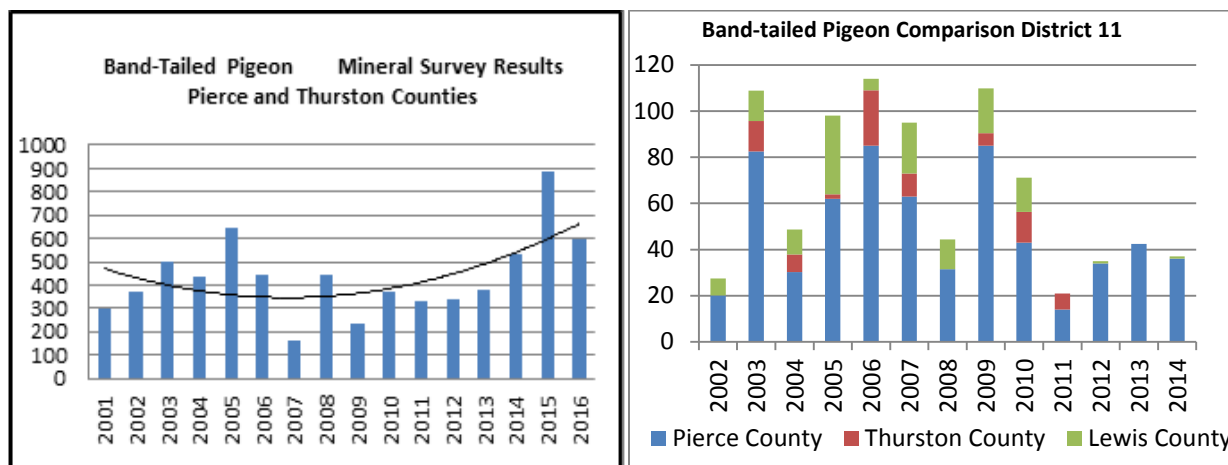


**Figure 28.** Turkey harvest in District 11 2008-2015.

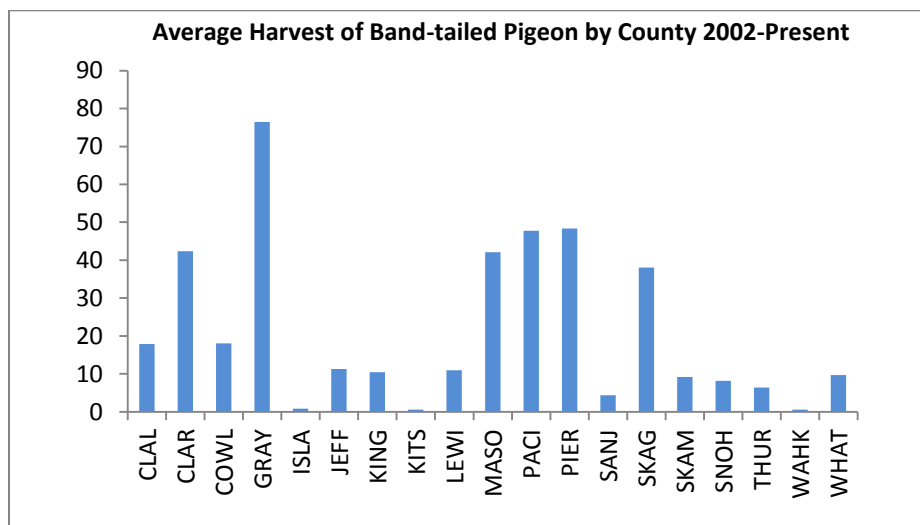


## BAND-TAILED PIGEONS

Band-tailed pigeon estimates based on mineral site surveys have been trending upwards in the district since 2013, and rose sharply in 2015 due to a significant increase in band-tails counted at the Mud Bay location. Pierce County in District 11 has the second highest average harvest in Washington, and thus prospects for hunting band-tails in the district are good. Total harvest in Pierce County in 2014 was 36 pigeons. No pigeons were harvested in Thurston County, and only one in Lewis County. They both rank low compared to other western counties (2015 reports not available at this writing). The best hunting locations for band-tails in District 11 are the Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge and the Luhr Beach area (Pierce/Thurston county boundary), Mud Bay (Thurston County), Totten Inlet/Oyster Bay (Thurston County), and along marine shorelines of District 11.



**Figure 29.** Band-tailed pigeon Mineral survey results and comparisons, 2001-2016.

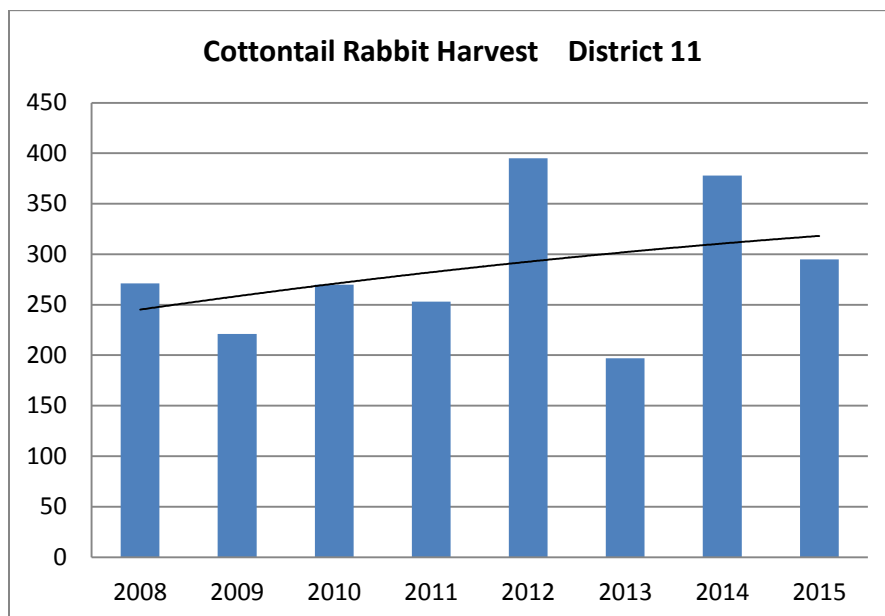


**Figure 30.** Average harvest of band-tailed pigeon by county, 2002-2015.

## COTTONTAIL RABBIT

District 11 provides some of the best cottontail rabbit hunting opportunities in western Washington. Rabbits are prolific in the shrub and grassland habitats found throughout Pierce and Thurston counties. Cottontail rabbit harvest in the district remained stable from 2008 to 2011, spiked significantly in 2012 and 2014, and declined slightly in 2015. The average harvest since 2008 has been 285 cottontails across the district annually. Pierce County had the fifth highest harvest of all western Washington counties in 2015. Consequently, prospects for cottontail rabbit hunters in Pierce County in 2016 are high. Thurston and Lewis counties traditionally contain fewer cottontails.

Success (harvest per unit effort) has declined in Pierce and Thurston counties since 2010, but increased in Lewis County. Note that some of this trend is likely due to lack of hunter participation in Lewis and Thurston counties. Pierce County remains one of the best places in the south Puget Sound to hunt cottontails.



**Figure 31.** Cottontail rabbit harvest in District 11 2008-2015.